



**Burnet**  
reach for the many

# Thanks to you...

Autumn 2025



Your unwavering support drives progress—advancing knowledge, changing lives, and sparking research breakthroughs.

Message from the CEO:

# Advancing knowledge, changing lives: the power of your generosity



I'd like to begin with a heartfelt thank you. Your continued generosity drives us to be even more ambitious in our purpose to deliver life-changing research and healthcare for all.

This edition of *Thanks to You* is filled with stories that highlight how much you've helped speed our progress and expand the possibilities of our work.

Our researchers now have access to a new, high-resolution microscope – a game-changing tool, which will be at the forefront of our work for decades to come. This landmark purchase was made with the help of a group of long-standing donors who were recently welcomed to our laboratories for a close-up look at the new technology's extraordinary capabilities.

In this edition, we also celebrate the inspiring journey of one of our most steadfast donors, Pennie Vogel, who became a supporter after seeing Burnet through the eyes of her son, Professor Josh Vogel. Josh is currently one of the leads of our Global Women's and Newborn's Health Group.

While some donors, like Pennie, are drawn to our work through personal connections, others give simply because they see a need and want

to help. That spirit of generosity was on full display in our end-of-year fundraising appeal, where the goal was to fund a reliable 4WD to help keep our researchers in Papua New Guinea on the road. Thanks to you, we surpassed our \$80,000 goal, raising \$139,000 – enough to purchase a vehicle, kit it out for research, and cover running costs for up to a year!

Your long-term support of our COVID research has been a powerful catalyst for progress. Having partnered with us in developing a promising universal vaccine for future strains, you are now contributing to our efforts to understand and address long COVID. In this edition, we share some exciting updates, including the news that our team are fast-tracking trials of existing antivirals to assess their potential as treatments for long COVID.

In this edition, we recognise the immense contributions of Jason Hearn, our Major Gift Officer, who has retired after more than a decade with Burnet. Jason's ability to connect, inspire, and innovate has been a cornerstone of our fundraising success, and we wish him all the best for his next chapter.

Each of the achievements shared in this edition is a direct result of your support. We are deeply grateful for your unwavering commitment. If you'd like to share the story behind your own journey of donating to Burnet, we'd love to hear from you and celebrate your contribution.

**Professor Brendan Crabb AC**  
Director and CEO



Driving change:

## A new 4WD for life-saving health work in PNG, thanks to you!

Every day, our researchers in Papua New Guinea (PNG) travel treacherous mountain roads to reach remote communities in need. Those rugged journeys take a toll on our vehicles—and every time a car goes in for repairs, it means taking one of our teams off the road.

So, when it came time to launch our end-of-year fundraising campaign, we had one clear goal in mind: raising \$80,000 for a reliable new 4WD to keep our teams moving.

Thanks to you, we didn't just meet our target—we smashed it! Together, we raised an incredible \$139,000, making it possible to purchase the vehicle, fit it out to carry essential and delicate equipment for our researchers, and cover running costs for up to a year. That's an extraordinary result.

### Going the distance

In PNG, access to health services is a challenge, especially for those living in remote areas. For years, our teams have been bringing life-changing medical research and health support programs directly to isolated villages, setting up mobile clinics and community workshops in meeting halls, marketplaces—even under mango trees. They often spend hours—sometimes days—on the road, but without a reliable vehicle, those vital trips simply can't happen.

This new, fully funded 4WD changes everything. It means our researchers can maintain regular

contact with communities, supporting mothers and babies through pregnancy and childhood, protecting public health, and treating infectious diseases before they spread.

### Your rapid response

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed—including those who helped unlock our \$29,000 matching gift challenge. Your generosity doubled the impact of every dollar donated and helped us go beyond what we thought was possible.

"It means our teams can continue visiting communities and do what they do best—medical research and public health implementation," says Amy Williamson, Deputy Country Director for Burnet Institute in PNG. "We are truly grateful. Thank you again for making this possible."

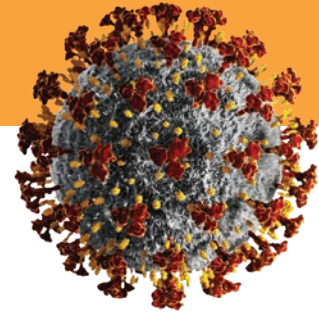
### What's next?

With the funds secured, our team is moving quickly to purchase and fit out the new 4WD. Every kilometre it travels will be thanks to you. To everyone who contributed—thank you. You're helping keep our teams on the road and bringing health and hope to communities in need.

To learn more about the appeal and watch a heartfelt message of thanks from Amy Williamson, Deputy Country Director, Papua New Guinea, Burnet Institute, visit: [researchvehicle.burnet.edu.au](https://researchvehicle.burnet.edu.au)



# Pioneering research: For a future free from COVID and long COVID



From day one, our donors have stood alongside us in what we always knew would be a long journey: the critical mission to come to grips with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and ensure that communities everywhere are protected against its impacts.

One of our earliest breakthroughs was a vaccine candidate, engineered in our own laboratories, that could address new variants of the virus as they emerged - in other words, a universal COVID vaccine. Our donor community has been an essential part of progressing this vital research, helping to fund the proof-of-concept studies that allowed us to refine the vaccine, and then backing the preclinical validation studies we needed before engaging with industry partners to progress further.

In parallel, we have been making significant strides towards understanding and tackling long COVID, a condition that can leave people with debilitating symptoms for months or even years.



Relatively early in the pandemic, researchers discovered that remnants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus can persist in various tissues and organs for extended periods - a phenomenon known as 'viral persistence'.

What remains unknown is whether these remnants are simply leftover inactive fragments, or whether they are still 'active'. This distinction is critical because if the virus is still active, antiviral treatments could offer hope and relief for those suffering from long COVID.

With your support, we are now fast-tracking trials of existing antiviral treatments to better understand their impact on COVID-19, while also developing and testing new drugs in our laboratories. Burnet Director and CEO Professor Brendan Crabb AC said he was optimistic that better treatments, and even a cure for long COVID, were within reach. "The support of our donors is crucial to our scientific breakthroughs," he said.

"Your generosity and commitment to Burnet's mission is accelerating our progress towards finding and implementing solutions that will keep people safe from COVID-19, long COVID and future coronaviruses."

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we are making a difference.

(Left to right) Researchers Dr Andy Poubourios, Christine Langer, Associate Professor Heidi Drummer and Irene Boo



Dr. Betty Kouskousis demonstrating the advantages of the latest microscopy technology

## Revealing the invisible: Donors bring revolutionary microscopy to Burnet

When Dr Betty Kouskousis welcomed donors to Burnet's laboratories for a rare, behind-the-scenes tour, she wondered how, in just 30 minutes, she could possibly convey the enormous, transformative impact of their contribution.

"When you become a researcher, obviously you love the science, but you do it because you want to help the world. You want to make things better," says Betty, a microscopy specialist. "And thanks to our donors, we now have a groundbreaking tool to help us do just that."

The purchase of the revolutionary new high-resolution microscope, backed by a small group of long-time donors, is already transforming research in the Burnet laboratories, speeding our progress towards better treatments for diseases like malaria, COVID-19, tuberculosis, Hepatitis C, and HIV.

"The most precious commodity for a researcher is time," Betty explains. "This new tool enables us to set up a complex experiment that may encompass a sequence such as performing a large overview scan of our sample, finding a specific element within the sample using predeveloped AI algorithms and then producing a high-resolution image of that region. We are able to set all this up, run the experiment and walk away from it to pursue other aspects of our research—that's amazing!"

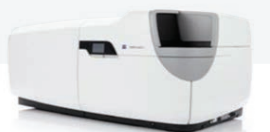
During the tour, donors gathered around the screen as cellular components were revealed in vivid detail—first the nucleus, then proteins, then mitochondria. Donors were able to see the

intercellular compartments of the cell using super-resolution microscopy. To put this into context the cytoskeletal proteins observed are approximately 7nm in diameter and only micrometres in length. Seeing the impact of their donations come to life on the screen was an exciting moment.

"Everyone's always blown away - even me!" Betty says with a smile.

None of this would have been possible without the support of donors including the Will and Dorothy Bailey Charitable Fund, The Ian Potter Foundation, Joe White Bequest, Orloff Family Charitable Trust, and the William Angliss Charitable Fund. Their generosity has given Burnet researchers access to technology that will shape our work for decades to come, helping us to better understand diseases, improve treatments, and ultimately, save lives.

"This instrument will be used for research for the next 20 or 30 years, maybe even longer," Betty reflects. "By funding this machine, our donors are making an impact that will last for generations."



To find out how you can help fund the next groundbreaking technology for our labs, or to express interest in a lab tour, please contact Lorelle Lake at [lorelle.lake@burnet.edu.au](mailto:lorelle.lake@burnet.edu.au) or on **0411 488 506**.



## From family ties to global impact: Pennie Vogel's journey with Burnet



Pennie Vogel first learned of Burnet through her son, the internationally renowned perinatal epidemiologist and public health researcher, Professor Josh Vogel. At the time, he was working with the World Health Organization in Switzerland, but the incredible work and extraordinary reputation of Burnet were a compelling argument for a return home.

Today, Josh helps lead Burnet's Global Women's and Newborn's Health Group, working to improve the health and wellbeing of mothers, babies, and families across the Asia-Pacific region. As a proud mother, Pennie couldn't be more inspired by his work — or more grateful to be part of it through her ongoing support.

For Pennie, being a monthly Research Action Partner donor is about more than just giving — it's about being connected to a cause she believes in. "My donations are relatively modest, but I know they help provide ongoing support for research and projects that are critical to the health and wellbeing of many thousands of people," she says.

That sense of purpose became even clearer when Pennie had the chance to meet some of Josh's colleagues at a recent birthday celebration.

"I was struck by how they all shared a deep desire to help their fellow humans. These are people who have dedicated their lives to others, and I feel so proud to support them," she says.

“

“Josh has always been passionate about research and public health,” Pennie shares. “I remember when he was just a young medical graduate, he told me, ‘With good research, we can deliver programs that will have an enormous impact on so many people.’ That really stuck with me.”

For Pennie, being part of the Burnet community is deeply rewarding. “There's a real feel-good factor in knowing I'm supporting such good people doing such important work,” she says with a smile. “I'm grateful to play even a small part in Burnet's impact.”

### Tell us your story!

We really enjoy hearing from our supporters – the stories of how you first came to support us and why are so varied and so interesting. If you'd like to be featured in an upcoming edition of *Thanks To You*, we'd love to hear from you.

Please get in touch via [giving@burnet.edu.au](mailto:giving@burnet.edu.au)

## Meet Deborah

We're thrilled to welcome and introduce Deborah Kane, your new Donation Processing Assistant and Supporter Relations contact.

Bringing with her a wealth of experience, Deborah's expertise in project administration and donor relations will be instrumental in ensuring your contact information is up to date and generous contributions are processed with care and efficiency, helping us continue to drive our lab-based research, and pioneering public health and international development work forward.

“

“I look forward to connecting with you soon - get in touch today.”

To update your contact details, make a donation, enquire about our latest appeal or for any queries regarding your support, please contact Deborah on **(03) 9282 2221** or at [giving@burnet.edu.au](mailto:giving@burnet.edu.au).

**Welcome to the team, Deborah!**



Deborah Kane, Donation Processing Assistant, Burnet Institute

## Have you considered becoming a Research Action Partner?

When you sign up to become a monthly donor, you join an inspiring community of supporters dedicated to driving change – known as Research Action Partners.

Through a monthly gift, you'll play a vital role in empowering scientists, researchers and medical professionals, all striving to eradicate harmful diseases and improve health outcomes in Australia and around the world. Together, we're turning hope into action, so no one is left behind.

Emma Colindres-Lira,  
Regular Giving Liaison,  
Burnet Institute



To learn more about becoming a Research Action Partner and how your ongoing monthly support can change lives, contact Emma Colindres-Lira at [giving@burnet.edu.au](mailto:giving@burnet.edu.au) or via mobile on **0407 007 727**.

# A grateful goodbye to Jason Hearn after a decade of dedication



After more than a decade spent inspiring our supporters and strengthening our philanthropic foundations, Major Gift Officer Jason Hearn bid farewell to Burnet in February.

His retirement marks the close of a career dedicated to advancing health equity through fundraising, advocacy, and community-building.

Jason joined Burnet in 2013 as a volunteer after a long career in the pharmaceutical industry, encouraged by his friend Paul Rathbone, now Burnet's Chief of Staff. Before long, he became an indispensable member of the Philanthropy and Supporter Engagement team.

"Jason was looking for a role where he could really use his communication and relationship management skills to improve the wellbeing of others, I couldn't think of a better place for him than at Burnet," Paul said.

"I have collaborated with so many incredible people, gathering together the funding our researchers need to do their extraordinary work," says Jason. "Some of my proudest moments include encouraging 'mum and dad' donors to become regular monthly givers, setting up ongoing scholarships, putting philanthropic life into bat research, and more recently, Burnet's Healthy Ageing Inflammaging research!" (See next article for more on this topic.)

Jason's unique ability to connect with people and inspire support has been at the heart of his success—along with a knack for out-of-the-box thinking.

His annual Cocktails and Conversation event was legendary, shining a light on cutting-edge HIV research while raising significant funds. "Whoever was present at those events knew them to be a hoot!" he recalls with a smile. Jason's commitment extends beyond his working role—he has chosen Burnet as a beneficiary in his own will and is a dedicated monthly donor.

"That's the depth of my belief in Burnet Institute and everyone who is helping the next generations within the organisation," he says.

Professor Brendan Crabb AC was among many to pay tribute to Jason's impact.

“

Jason's unwavering passion for our purpose has been extraordinary. His work has not only secured crucial funding for Burnet's research, but he has built lasting relationships and helped foster a culture of philanthropy that will continue long after his retirement.”

As Jason prepares for his next chapter, his legacy at Burnet is undeniable. His warmth, creativity, and tireless dedication have left an indelible mark. From all of us at Burnet—thank you, Jason. Your efforts have inspired many and helped keep the lights on in the labs - we are forever grateful.

# Can we slow the decline of immune systems? Our researchers are close



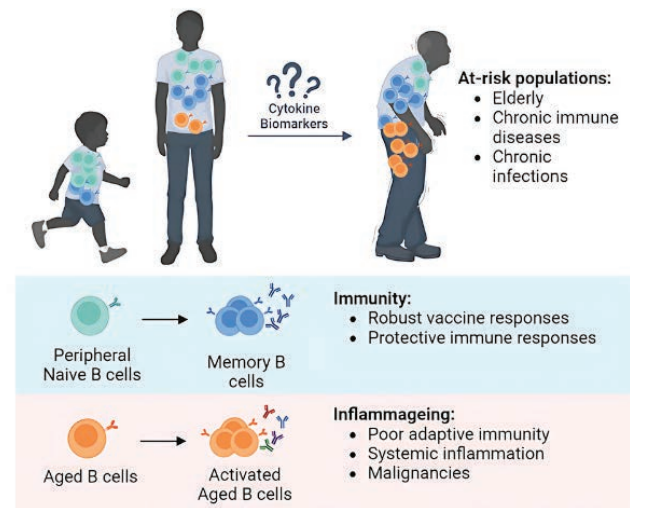
We might not be able to stop the passage of time, but Dr Raffi Gugasyan and the Healthy Ageing Research team may have found a way to slow the progress of something else—the detrimental, biological process of 'inflammaging'. Inflammaging is the chronic build-up of low-grade inflammation in your body over time. It doesn't just accompany ageing; it speeds it up as we get older, increasing the risk of age-related conditions like heart disease, arthritis, and type 2 diabetes.

For some time now, the team has focused on understanding exactly what it is that causes inflammaging. We know, for example, that when we're young, our immune system is rich in 'Naïve B cells' which protect us from infection, enhance the work of vaccines, and help keep us healthy. Over time, these beneficial B cells are transformed into harmful 'Aged B cells' which act to weaken our immune system and trigger chronic inflammation.

The breakthrough from Raffi and his team was the discovery that certain key biomarkers, called 'cytokines', are released as B cells age—and that one or more of these cytokines are responsible for triggering the development of overactive Aged B cells that fuel inflammaging.

It's a very exciting insight that could transform how we approach ageing in the 21st century, paving the way for therapies that target Aged B cells, which ultimately slows or prevent the impact of inflammaging.

With their findings recognised as a strong candidate for future treatments, Raffi and his team are working on securing intellectual property rights and partners to collaborate on the next phase of work: turning this cutting-edge discovery into real-world treatments that promise not just a longer life, but a healthier one.



When we're young, we have robust immunity. As we age, our immune cells change, triggering unnecessary inflammation. Thanks to the Healthy Ageing Research team, we now know that certain biomarkers are driving that change. If we can identify and target the most harmful ones, we may be able to slow the onset of age-related diseases.

## Want to know more?

To learn more about this pioneering research and how you can support the next phase of this work, get in touch with Shannon O'Brien, Major Gift Specialist on **0409 357 307** or via email at [shannon.obrien@burnet.edu.au](mailto:shannon.obrien@burnet.edu.au)



# A passion for science, a heart for giving



"Why? Because I won too much money, and I don't need it!" she says with characteristic generosity. "I want to keep supporting the mothers and babies of Papua New Guinea, so the next generation has better opportunities."

## A growing passion for science and helping others

Jojo's visit to Burnet last year deepened her interest in health care. Her tour of the labs with malaria specialist Dr Linda Reiling sparked her curiosity about the real-world impacts of science, and the rigorous nature of medical research.

"It takes a lot of small steps and a lot of waiting for change to happen," she says.

Jojo has also begun volunteering with St John Ambulance. She trains weekly and recently completed her first volunteer shift at the local Carols by Candlelight event.

"I really enjoy learning about different types of medical situations and how to look after people," she says.

## Looking ahead

As for what's next, Jojo is focused on her studies, with dreams of one day attending the University of Melbourne. She is also eager for a return visit to the Burnet labs.

"I would like to come back soon, please!" she says. Jojo's story is a powerful reminder that curiosity and generosity often go hand in hand. With her love of science and her enthusiasm for supporting the work of the Burnet researchers, she is making a difference in a way that is—uniquely—Jojo. And we are just so grateful for that support, thanks Jojo!

Image: Jojo was pleasantly surprised to be declared the winner of the Dorothy Simmons Creative Writing Prize.

Welcome:

# Bronwyn Sugden



Bronwyn Sugden, Planned Giving Manager

We're delighted to welcome and introduce Bronwyn Sugden, your new Planned Giving Manager.

Bronwyn brings a wealth of experience in planned giving, with a strong background in collaborating with executors, estate solicitors, and accountants.

Passionate about understanding your values and interests, Bronwyn is committed to ensuring that together, we can create a more equitable world through health initiatives.

When the time comes, Bronwyn can help guide you in creating a meaningful legacy, making it seamless and impactful. Get in touch with Bronwyn for a confidential chat today!

## Did you know gifts in Wills are critical to powering research at Burnet?

To find out more about leaving a gift in your Will or setting up an endowment fund please contact Bronwyn on **0412 871 919** or at [bronwyn.sugden@burnet.edu.au](mailto:bronwyn.sugden@burnet.edu.au)



# Thank you for your insights!

We are incredibly grateful for your time and thoughts. Your responses help us understand your passion for health research and what drives you to support Burnet.

Here are some of the exciting findings:



## Equity matters to you.

Almost all respondents agreed that 'everyone should have access to appropriate health care no matter where they live' and that 'It's not fair that so many people in developing countries experience suffering and death from disease when other countries don't'.



## You are patient.

The vast majority of you agreed with the statement that 'discovery research takes time'. Your consistent support over the years has been crucial in achieving many breakthroughs and saving lives. Thank you for your unwavering patience and dedication!



## You are visionary.

Nearly 1 in 5 of respondents have already left a gift to Burnet in their Will, plan to, or are considering leaving a gift in their Will. Your forward-thinking generosity is truly inspiring. Thank you.



## You love social connection.

Almost half of you prefer meeting in person. It's wonderful to see that the art of face-to-face conversation is still alive and well. We look forward to more in-person interactions!

## We'd love to hear from you!

Thank you so much for your incredible support. Your feedback is important to us, and we'd love to hear your thoughts. Please complete our latest survey to help us understand your interests.

**DONOR SURVEY**  
Better understanding your areas of interest. We'd love to hear from you.  
Thank you so much for your support. We'd love your feedback to help us better understand what you're interested in and why.

your details:  
Suggested ID:  
Your name:  
Address:  
Phone:  
Date of birth:  
Email Address:

1. Did you donate to the recent Christmas fundraising appeal helping to raise funds to replace our worn out fleet of 4WDs with a more reliable research vehicle?  
 Yes  
 No  
What was it that most influenced your decision to support this area of work?

2. What other areas of our work are you interested in supporting in future fundraising campaigns?  
 Wherever the need is greatest.  
 Research related to alcohol and other drugs.  
 Sexual and reproductive health.  
 Mental health (especially in young people).  
 Health security, including pandemic preparedness to detect emerging health issues early and respond faster.  
 Other national, state and sub-state health programs.  
 In Australia.  
 In the Asia Pacific region.  
 Disease elimination research.  
 The ongoing response to COVID-19 and understanding more about long-COVID.  
 Elimination of HIV as a health threat here in Australia and globally.  
 The WHO's efforts to eliminate malaria by 2030.  
 Elimination of tuberculosis.  
 Asymptomatic hepatitis.  
 Viral hepatitis.

3. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us not covered in this survey?

Thank you for your support



Simply scan the QR code or complete and return the survey included in this pack. We can't wait to hear from you!

This newsletter has been printed on FSC accredited stock.

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### Overseas

Burnet has offices in Papua New Guinea and Myanmar, and also contributes to research and public health programs in many other countries across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Europe, and North America.

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